



April 23, 2013

Chairman Greg Walden
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
Committee on Energy and Commerce

Ranking Member Anna Eshoo
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
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RE: The Importance of Lifeline Phones to Individuals with Disabilities

Dear Chairman Walden, Ranking Member Eshoo, Members of the Subcommittee on Communications and Technology:

The National Disability Rights Network (NDRN) is the nonprofit membership organization for the federally mandated Protection and Advocacy (P&A) and Client Advocacy Program (CAP) agencies for individuals with disabilities. The P&As and CAPs were established by the United States Congress through eight separate programs to protect the rights of people with disabilities and their families through legal support, advocacy, referral, and education. The P&A and CAP network advocates for people with disabilities to receive appropriate services to allow them to live and work independently and fully integrated into the community.

We are writing to express our support for the Lifeline program. The Lifeline program provides affordable essential phone service to households with very low incomes. Phone connectivity is essential for these households to reach emergency services in a timely manner, and to maintain connectivity to friends, family, employers, providers of social services, medical professionals, teachers, and for engaging in day to day activities such as refilling a prescription or finding out how much value remains on a prepaid card. The standard wireless Lifeline product provides 250 minutes a month, which is a little over 4 hours a month – a very modest amount.

The Lifeline program is particularly important for individuals with disabilities. People with disabilities have nearly twice the level of unemployment and one third the labor force participation as individuals without a disability. People with

disabilities are highly dependent on telecommunications to take care of their health, to decrease social isolation, to handle emergencies, and find employment. Without the connectivity afforded by Lifeline, many people with disabilities would have difficulty living independently, and would have to resort to restrictive institutional care. For many people with disabilities, the Lifeline program is not just a convenience – it is a critical life need.

The Lifeline program was recently reformed to prevent fraud, waste and abuse. The reforms affect both the consumer and the carriers. These reforms went into place last year and should be given a chance to roll-out before disrupting this vital public safety program.

The Lifeline Program is one that is important to providing equal access to people with disabilities, and I urge you to support this valuable program. If you would like more information, please contact Patrick Wojahn at 202-408-9514, x102, or patrick.wojahn@ndrn.org. Thank you for your careful review of this input.

Sincerely,



Curt Decker
Executive Director